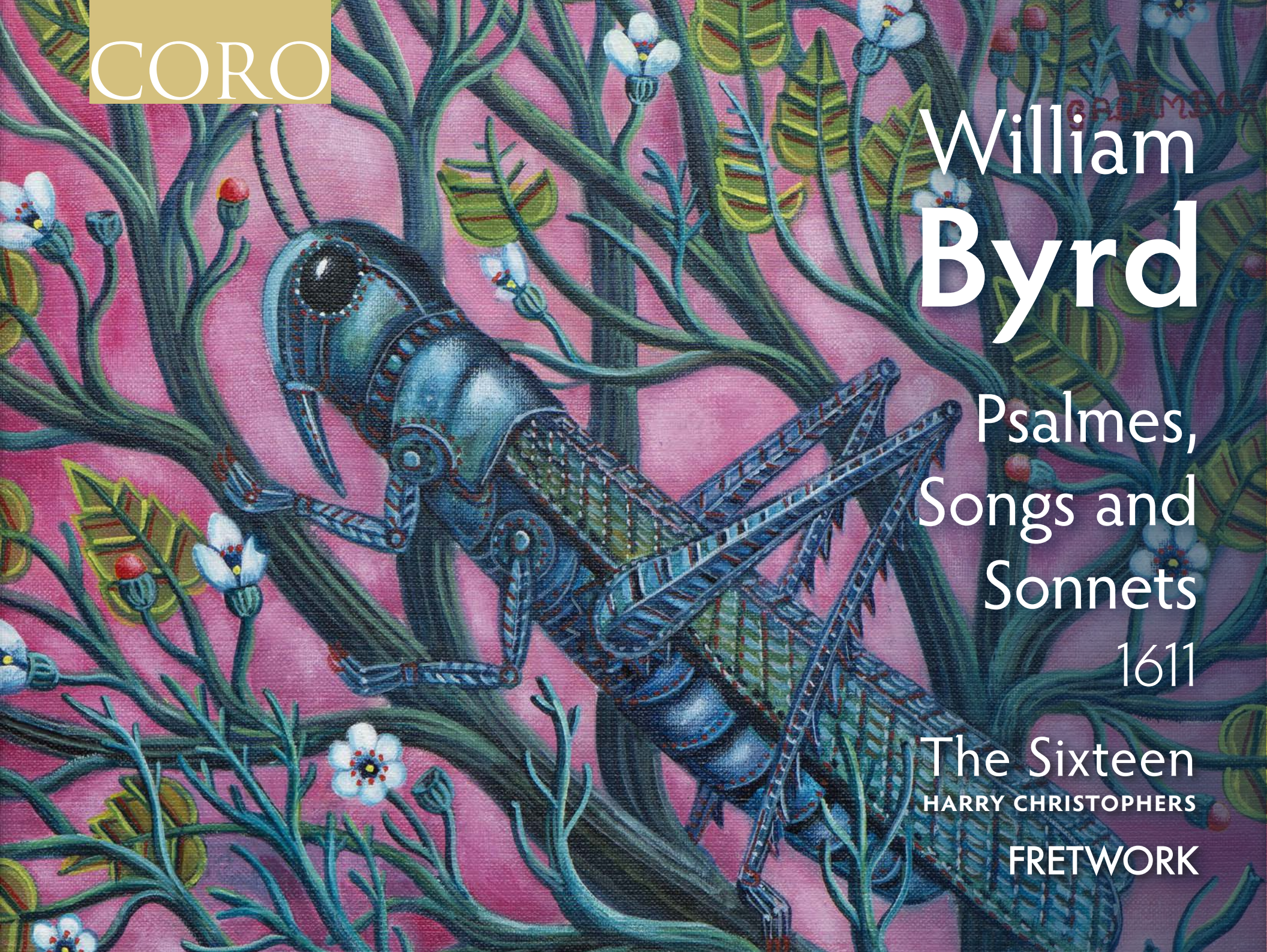

CORO
William
Byrd
Psalmes,
Songs and
Sonnets
1611
The Sixteen
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS
FRETWORK

"To all true lovers of Musicke....
Being excited by your kind acceptance of my former travails in Musicke, I am thereby much encouraged to commend to you these my last labours, for my "ultimum vale". Wherein I hope you shall find Musicke to content every humour: either melancholy, merry, or mixt of both."

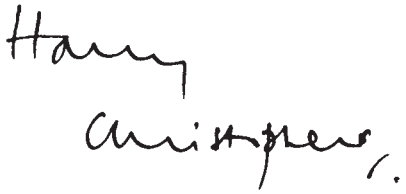
So wrote William Byrd in his dedicatory lines for this, his final, publication, *Psalmes, Songs and Sonnets*. Bizarrely enough for such a well-known composer of the English Renaissance, only a handful of the works contained in this volume are widely known; the madrigals *This sweet and merry month of May* with its paean to Queen Elizabeth I, and *Come woeful Orpheus* with its extraordinarily vivid word painting mirroring chromatic notes, sour sharps and uncouth flats are often performed; and likewise the Christmas motet *This day Christ was born*, which depicts Byrd at his most joyful, is well-known, but the rest of the collection has been relatively neglected. It was quite noticeable when William Byrd was BBC Radio 3's Composer of the Week, that this final collection was only mentioned in passing with no musical offering.

Byrd compiled the collection for the delectation of all, with both sacred and secular being represented. He opens with works for three voices, then four, then five culminating in six and along the way includes two fantasias (one in four parts and the other in six), plus two soul-searching solo songs with viol accompaniment, and two verse anthems. We are treated to an Aesop fable (*In winter cold* and *Whereat an ant*), some extraordinary madrigals where Byrd is making fun of the madrigalian style - I can imagine him chuckling away to himself while writing *Come jolly swains* - and then, in total contrast, a contemplation of a long life where Byrd looks back and takes stock as he nears the end in *Retire my soul, consider thine estate*.

There are other insights into Byrd's life. Late in 1594 he and his family moved to rural Essex, to the parish of Stondon Massey very close to his good friend Sir John Petre. The Petre family owned a magnificent house at Ingatestone and had assembled an excellent and like-minded religious and musical community there. Byrd often visited the Petres who kept a feather bed and a country coverlet in what was fondly known as "Mr Byrd's chamber". For the twelve days of Christmas, Sir John paid for a viol consort to play and as part of the holiday celebrations, Byrd wrote *O God that guides the cheerful sun ('A Carroll for New-year's day')*.

The vocal ranges within the collection are extraordinary; Byrd is never uniform and he varies his voice distribution throughout. The opening five pieces are in three parts, two low sopranos and a tenor who is, likewise, relatively low in his range compared to the next three pieces where the tenor is taken to stratospheric heights along with the sopranos. The effects are exhilarating. Later in the collection we are treated to a motet in two sections, *Sing we merrily unto God our strength,* where once again Byrd is inventive in his distribution of voices – three high sopranos with alto and tenor all skating around in shimmering vocal tracery in the first section before resounding in vibrant triads to simulate the blowing of trumpets in the second section.

There is so much to enjoy in this collection; we had such fun recording it and we hope you will find equal enjoyment in listening to it. I take my hat off to the staggering versatility of my singers, going from small trios to consorts to full choir and the icing on the cake, reuniting with our good friends, Fretwork – always a delight.



CD 1

1	The eagle's force	2.25
2	Of flattering speech	1.47
3	In winter cold	1.19
4	Whereat an ant	1.35
5	Who looks may leap	2.02
6	Sing ye to our Lord a new song	1.59
7	I have been young, but now am old	1.30
8	In crystal towers	3.30
9	This sweet and merry month of May	3.14
10	Let not the sluggish sleep	2.31
11	A feigned friend	3.12
12	Awake mine eyes	2.22
13	Come jolly swains	2.19
14	What is life, or worldly pleasure?	2.26
15	Fantasia (in 4 parts)	2.34
16	Come let us rejoice unto our Lord	1.54
17	Retire my soul, consider thine estate	3.44
18	Arise Lord into thy rest	2.34
19	Come woeful Orpheus	4.04
	CD 1 Running Time	47.02

CD 2

1	Sing we merrily unto God	1.45
2	Blow up the trumpet	2.17
3	Crowned with flowers	2.36
4	Wedded to will is witless	2.25
5	Make we joy to God	2.23
6	Have mercy upon me O God	4.25
7	Fantasia (in 6 parts)	4.28
8	This day Christ was born	2.35
9	O God that guides the cheerful sun	6.05
10	Praise our Lord all ye Gentiles	3.20
11	Turn our captivity, O Lord	4.41
12	Ah silly soul	3.09
13	How vain the toils	2.45
	CD 2 Running Time	42.53
	Album Running Time	89.55

Psalmes, Songs, and Sonnets:

some solemne, others joyfull, framed to the life of the Words: Fit for Voyces or Viols of 3. 4. 5. and 6. Parts.

That was the title William Byrd gave his last songbook, printed in 1611. The listener will soon discover that the "joyfull" songs far outnumber the "solemne" ones; this is the happiest, most serene collection of music Byrd ever produced. He was entering his eighth decade when he published it, and his own preface to it (which we will explore throughout these pages) gives us some precious insights into his state of mind at the time, starting with the very first sentence: "The naturall inclination and love to the art of Musicke, wherein I have spent the better part of mine age, have beene so powerfull in me, that even in my old yeares which are desirous of rest, I cannot containe my selfe from taking some paines therein". All but a handful of these 32 songs had indeed been recently composed in his "old yeares". They were new creative work rather than a retrospective of Byrd's earlier life. He had long since retired from his active career at court, and he was hardly in need of any more financial profit from the music publishing industry. What drove him to write these songs, and to collect them for performance, was his own "naturall inclination and love to the art of Musicke", which remained every bit as strong as he grew older.

1611 was a good year for the arts in England. It was the year of Shakespeare's *Tempest*—the last and most musical of his plays—and the King James Version of the Bible. This was also the generation that saw a rapid rise in the popularity of viol-playing, and Byrd's *Psalmes, Songs, and Sonnets* is the only one of his songbooks specifying stringed instruments as well as voices. Byrd's musical textures are nearly as diverse as the noises, sounds, and sweet airs heard on Prospero's island. Many of these songs include radiant high soprano parts, sometimes two of them, often the most striking and important lines of all. This was

the sound of English chamber music in the early 17th century: the voices of women (without whom private music-making in the late Renaissance would hardly have flourished at all) and of children (more and more of whom were singing with great skill in their own homes, a happy development encouraged by Byrd himself, who famously did his best "to perswade every one to learne to sing"). The book is dedicated to Byrd's patron Francis Clifford, fourth Earl of Cumberland, whose own house was a centre of Jacobean musical life, praised as "the Muses' palace" by the composer and poet Thomas Campion.

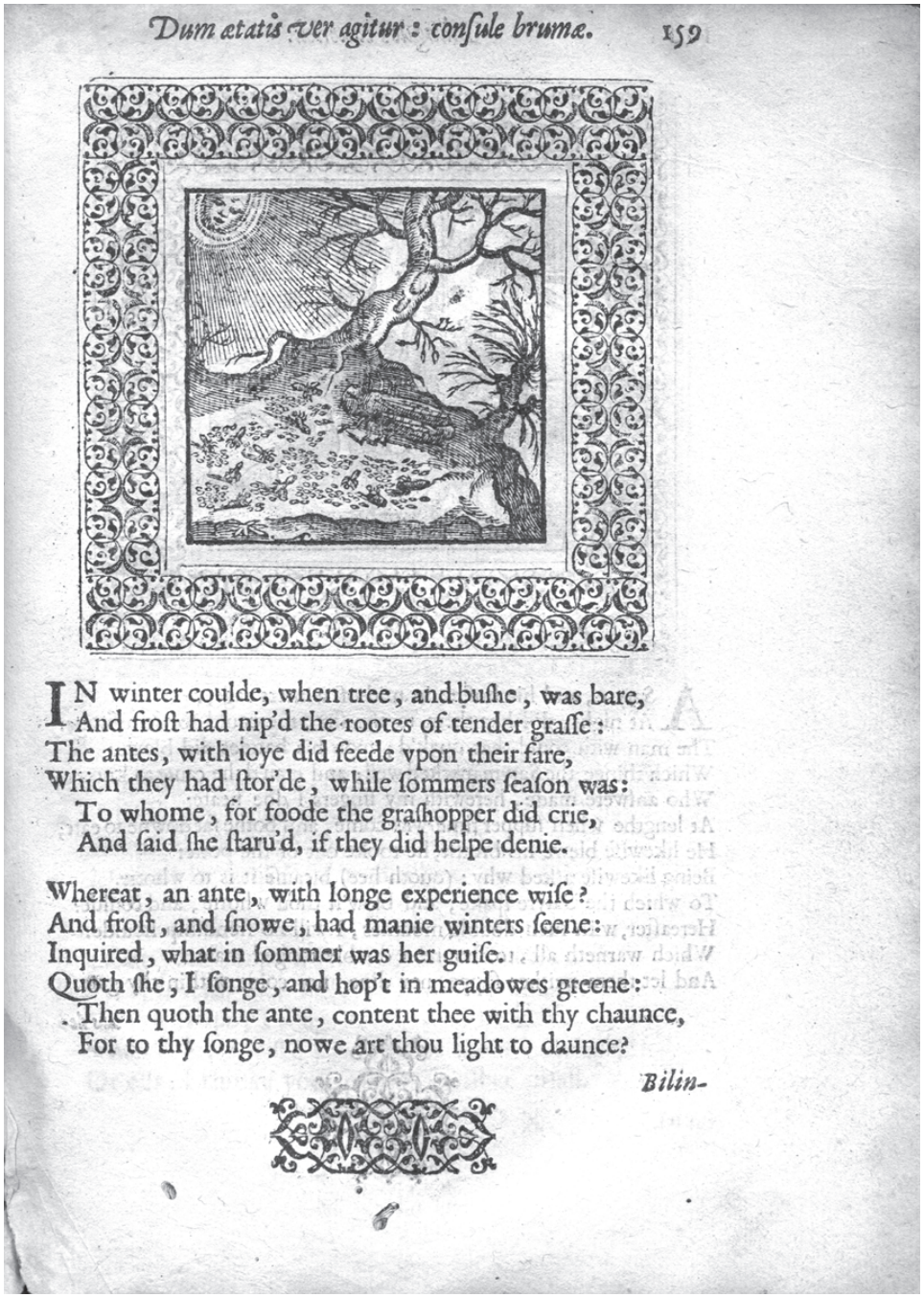
Byrd arranged his *Psalmes, Songs, and Sonnets* with an increasing number of voices, moving from lighter fare to richer and more complex sounds. He did not always follow that traditional rule when he published music, but he chose to return to it here. The present recording takes listeners on the same journey, starting with small three-part songs and gradually building up to six-part works that use various combinations of viols, solo voices, and choruses. Each stage of the journey reveals a different facet of what Byrd called "Musicke to content every humour".

Three-voice singing was already a familiar English practice by the time Byrd started composing as a young man. There was a long tradition of Tudor folk music and popular music sung in three-part harmony. When a group of English diplomats, including the young Thomas Cromwell, went to Rome in 1518 to obtain political favours, their strategy was to offer sweet delicacies prepared in the English style, "brought in with a three-man's song (as we call it) in the English tongue, and all after the English fashion". The Pope was impressed by the audible "strangeness"—or, in modern parlance, the foreignness—of the music, and Cromwell and his colleagues were granted their papal audience. Nearly a century later, three-part singing was still popular in England, now including a growing repertory of canzonets and other trios borrowed from the Italian tradition. Byrd's own experiences seem to have encouraged him to spend time composing high-quality music for very small groups of musicians. Perhaps the best-known example is his Mass for Three Voices,

written in the early 1590s for clandestine Catholic services in private homes where singers were sometimes in short supply. During those same years, he also composed a set of elegant viol fantasias in just three parts. It was a special type of composition that he clearly treasured.

Of course a smaller number of parts does not always mean an easier task for the performers, and some of the three-part songs in the 1611 *Psalmes, Songs, and Sonnets* are delightfully virtuosic, with plenty of fast-moving ornamentation and vocal ranges that approach two octaves. No voice is ever idle for more than a few seconds. This music is anything but austere. In fact the joyful sound that Byrd creates here seems occasionally to be at variance with the moralising and sententious tone of some of the texts, warning against flattery, foolishness, improvidence, and speaking too soon. One of those warnings—in the pair of songs ***In winter cold*** and ***Whereat an ant***—is taken from Aesop's familiar fable of the ant and the grasshopper. Like many of the poems in this part of the collection, it comes from Geffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblems*, a book of proverbs and moral lessons with elaborate woodcut illustrations. *Whereat an ant* is illustrated with a swarm of ants busily gathering their food under a hot summer sun. ***Of flattering speech*** shows a sinister-looking snake winding itself around the base of a flourishing plant—a tone captured well in Byrd's musical setting. ***In crystal towers*** praises the simple life with an image of Diogenes dwelling in his barrel. In ***Who looks may leap***, a bird escapes from the hand of a careless hunter, never to be captured again. (Byrd seems to have enjoyed these avian allusions. In the very first song of the collection, ***The eagle's force***, he went to the trouble of capitalising the term 'Bird' in all of the vocal parts.)

The first of the many 'Psalmes' in this book are ***Sing ye to our Lord a new song*** and ***I have been young, but now am old***, both near the end of the opening section. Their style and mood is quite unlike that of the English psalm settings which Byrd had composed earlier in life. His *Songs of Sundrie Natures* in 1589 opened with a large group of severe and (as he called



Dum ætatis ver agitur : conſule brumæ. 159

IN winter coulde, when tree, and buſhe, was bare,
And froſt had nip'd the rootes of tender graſſe:
The antes, with ioye did feede vpon their fare,
Which they had ſtor'de, while ſommers ſeaſon was:
To whome, for foode the graſhopper did crie,
And ſaid ſhe ſtaru'd, if they did helpe denie.

Whereat, an ante, with longe experience wiſe?
And froſt, and ſnowe, had manie winters ſeene:
Inquired, what in ſommer was her guiſe.
Quoth ſhe, I ſonge, and hop't in meadowes greene:
Then quoth the ante, content thee with thy chaunce,
For to thy ſonge, nowe art thou light to daunce?

Bilin-

Woodcut engravings from
A Choice of Emblemes, and other devises (1586)
by Geffrey Whitney
(*c.*1548-*c.*1601)

Special Collections Library,
Pennsylvania State University.

WHO lookes, maye leape: and ſaue his ſhinnes from knockes.
Who tries, maye truſte: els flattringe frendes ſhall finde.
He ſaues the ſteede, that keepes him vnder lockes.
Who ſpeakes with heede, maye bouldlie ſpeake his minde.
But hee, whoſe tonge before his witte, doth runne,
Ofte ſpeakes to ſoone, and greeues when he hathe done.

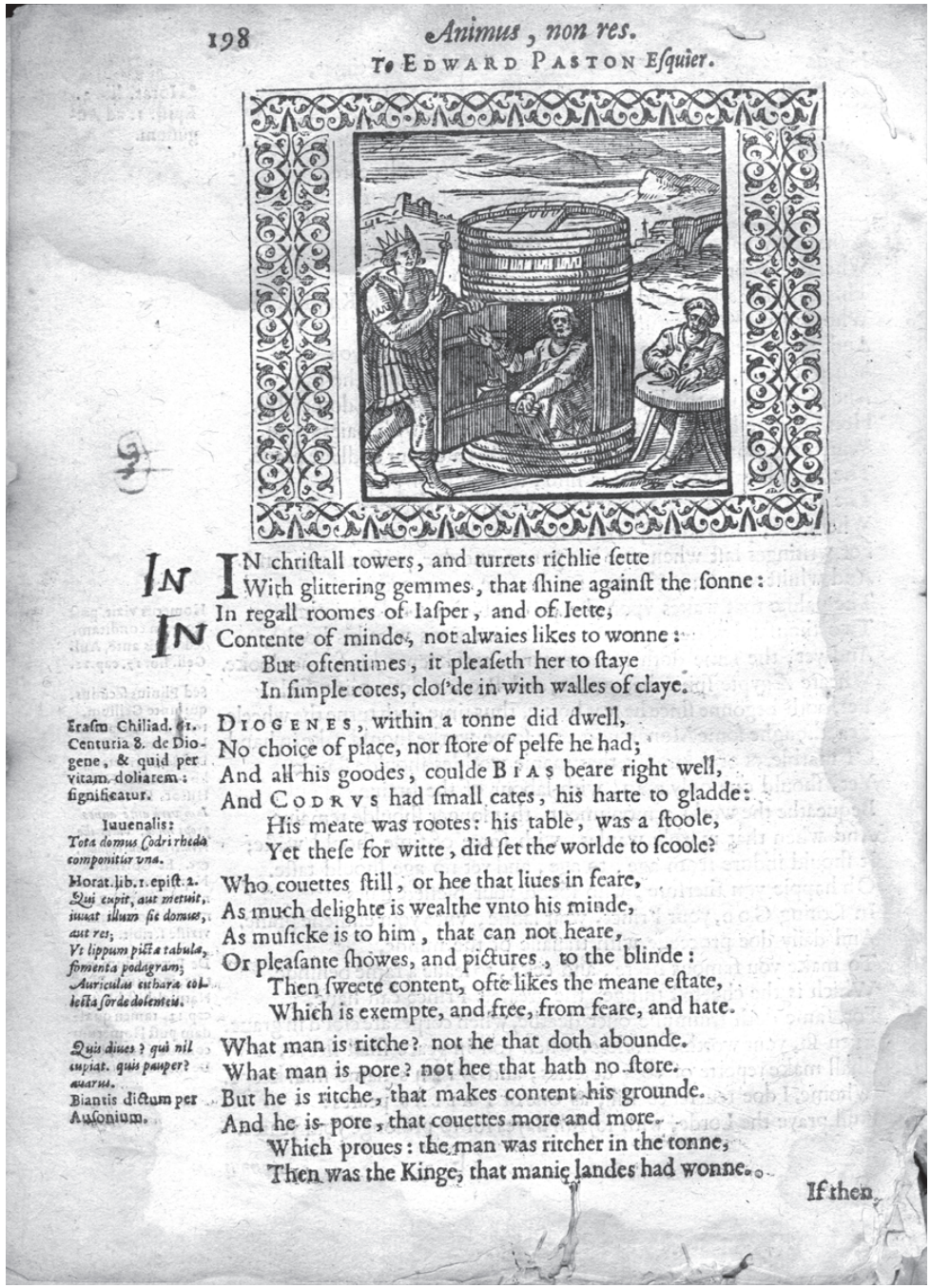
A worde once ſpoke, it can retourne no more,
But flies awaie, and ofte thy bale doth breede:
A wiſe man then, ſettes hatche before the dore,
And while he maye, doth ſquare his ſpeeche with heede.
The birde in hande, wee maye at will reſtraine,
But beinge flowen, wee call her backe in vaine.

In oc-

Praui ſicut in ſenſu leues, ita ſunt in locutione præcipites: Quia quod leuis cõſcientia concipit, leuior protinus lingua prodit. Greg. Homil. 5.

Horat. Epiſt. 18.
Et ſemel emiſſum volat irreuocabile verbum.

Et ſi vtile eſt ſubitò ſæpe dicere, tamen illud vtilius, ſumpto ſpacio ad cogitandum paratius, atque accuratius dicere. Cicero 2. De Orator.



198 *Animus, non res.*

To EDWARD PASTON *Esquier.*

IN IN christall towers, and turrets richlie sette
With glittering gemmes, that shine against the sonne:
In regall roomes of Iasper, and of Iette,
Contente of minde, not alwaies likes to wonne:
But oftentimes, it pleaseth her to staye
In simple cotes, clos'de in with walles of claye.

Erasm Chiliad. 1. Centuria 8. de Diogene, & quid per vitam doliarem: significatur.

DIOGENES, within a tonne did dwell,
No choice of place, nor store of pelfe he had;
And all his goodes, coulde BIAS beare right well,
And CODRVS had small cates, his harte to gladde:
His meate was rootes: his table, was a stoole,
Yet these for witte, did set the worlde to scoole?

Iuuenalis:
Tota domus Codri rhedæ componitur vna.

Horat. lib. 1. epist. 2.
Qui cupit, aut metuit, iuuat illum sic domus, aut res;
Vt lippum pictæ tabulæ, fomenta podagram;
Auriculas citharæ collecta sorde dolentes.

Who couettes still, or hee that liues in feare,
As much delighte is wealthe vnto his minde,
As musicke is to him, that can not heare,
Or pleasante showes, and pictures, to the blinde:
Then sweete content, ofte likes the meane estate,
Which is exempte, and free, from feare, and hate.

Quis diues? qui nil cupiat. quis pauper? auarus.
Biantis dictum per Ausonium.

What man is ritche? not he that doth abounde.
What man is pore? not hee that hath no store.
But he is ritche, that makes content his grounde.
And he is pore, that couettes more and more.
Which proues: the man was ritcher in the tonne,
Then was the Kinge, that manie landes had wonne.

If then

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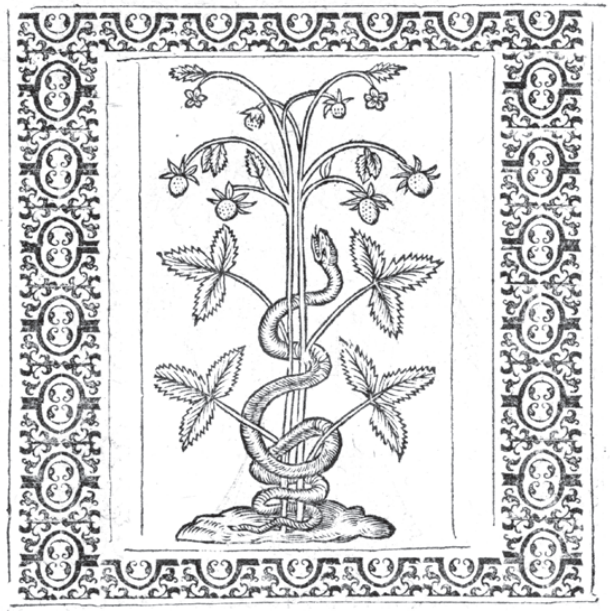

OF flattringe ſpeeche, with ſugred wordes beware,
Suſpect the harte, whoſe face doth fawne, and ſmile,
With truſting theiſe, the worlde is clog'de with care,
And fewe there bee can ſcape theiſe vipers vile:
With pleaſinge ſpeeche they promiſe, and proteſt,
When hatefull hartes lie hidd within their breſt.

The faithfull wight, dothe neede no collours braue,
But thoſe that truſte, in time his truthe ſhall trie,
Where fawning mates, can not theire credit ſaue,
Without a cloake, to flatter, faine, and lye:
No foe ſo fell, nor yet ſoe harde to ſcape,
As is the foe, that fawnes with freindlie ſhape.

Ouid 1. Art. *Tuta, frequensq; via eſt, per amici fallere nomen.*

Idem 1. Faſt. *Sic iterum, ſic ſæpe cadunt, vbi vincere aperte*
Non datur: inſidias, armaq; tecta parant.

Curis

them) "plaine" penitential psalms. Most of his newer psalms are happier and more hopeful pieces. In fact *Sing ye to our Lord* is the first opportunity that Byrd takes to slip into dance-like triple rhythms, a musical gesture that he will go on to use in nearly one-third of all the songs in this book. Like the majority of the nine psalm settings here (and the related Christmas piece *This day Christ was born*), *Sing ye to our Lord* uses a text taken directly from a Catholic source, Richard Verstegan's *Primer*, a book of hours for Jacobean Catholics which was published in Antwerp and imported secretly in large quantities for recusant use. Many of Byrd's 1611 psalms had their origin, like his Masses, in the private household devotions of English recusants. This left some traces that would have been noticed at the time—especially the habit of always referring to 'our Lord' rather than 'the Lord', which was widely recognized as a Catholic shibboleth in its day. (George Abbot, appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1611, said that "English people do practice it if they savor of Popery: so much that in all my life I have scant heard any in common speech always saying *Our Lord*, but that party hath more or less been tainted that way".) Byrd also avoided using the homely metrical paraphrases of psalms he had used so often in his earlier works. Instead he preferred the greater flexibility and decorum of biblical prose, which gave him more freedom to compose music that was "framed to the life of the Words". In fact the few psalms here which do not have a Catholic origin are taken more or less directly from the venerable Coverdale version which had already been the daily fare of several generations of Church of England choirs. At this point in his life, Byrd chose to use psalm texts that were known and loved by musicians themselves.

Most of the four-part music in the 1611 collection is thoroughly secular. The first and most famous of these pieces is ***This sweet and merry month of May***, one of the few items in the book that Byrd revived or recycled from his earlier life. It was the first real English madrigal ever published, one of "two excellent Madrigalls of Master William Byrds, composed after the Italian vaine" that were featured in 1590 in the *First Sett of Italian Madrigalls Englished*.

(The other was a heftier six-voice version of the same song. Byrd did not include it in this newer book; he clearly wanted to make room here for six-part music of a different kind.) *This sweet and merry month* was originally written as a May Day tribute to Queen Elizabeth, to "greet Eliza with a rhyme". This song, and the homegrown adaptations of Italian music printed with it in 1590, unleashed a flood of new English madrigals (sometimes of variable quality) whose traces can be seen in many of Byrd's own later four-part songs. ***Awake mine eyes*** and ***Come jolly swains*** are delightful examples of their genre, full of 'warbling throats' and laughing shepherds. Byrd is very much in line with the advice of his own student Thomas Morley in the *Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music,* offered in 1597 to composers who wanted to write madrigals: "If therefore you will compose in this kind you must possess yourself with an amorous humour… you must in your music be wavering like the wind, sometimes wanton, sometimes drooping, sometimes grave and staid, otherwhile effeminate, you may maintain points and revert them, use triplas and show the very uttermost of your variety, and the more variety you show the better shall you please". ***Come let us rejoice unto our Lord*** is a sacred song that uses very similar musical techniques.

The one real outlier in the four-voice section is ***What is life, or worldly pleasure?***, by far the simplest song Byrd ever composed, with barely a hint of any ornament or decoration. It also marks the point in the book where the viols will make their first appearance, in the four-part **Fantasia**—although, as Byrd says in his own title, all the music is in principle "Fit for Voyces or Viols", and some of the pieces in the first part of the collection would also make splendid instrumental fantasias in their own right. This fantasia for four viols seems to have become a popular piece in its day. It was arranged for keyboard (by no less a musician than Thomas Tomkins) and for lute, to be enjoyed as solo music by people who did not have the luxury of their own string consort at home.

About halfway through the book, Byrd takes at least a partial turn away from

lighter music. The first of the five-part songs, ***Retire my soul, consider thine estate***, is intense and introspective. It is not difficult to hear the voice of the aging composer himself in its plangent harmonies, reflecting on the ambitions and compromises of his own long life. "Write all these downe in pale Deathes reckoning tables: thy dayes will seem but dreames, thy hopes but fables". Byrd says in his preface to the *Psalms, Songs, and Sonnets* that "these are likely to be my last Travailes in this kind", and that mood of farewell is nowhere clearer than in *Retire my soul*. ***Come woeful Orpheus*** has attracted its share of attention among critics because of the "strange Cromatique Notes…. sowrest Sharps and uncouth Flats" in its central section, but it is anything but a gimmicky or superficial piece of music. The strange chromaticism is flawlessly integrated into the beauty of the song as a whole, and it certainly goes no further than various other English Renaissance composers had gone in their own harmonic adventures. Byrd creates other striking effects in some of his five-voice songs. ***Wedded to will is witless*** is a boisterous little piece that seizes the words for their pure percussive rhythm. ***Sing we merrily unto God*** uses three high treble parts for a bright, exuberant sound, including cameo appearances by a whole catalogue of instruments: the shawm, the tabret, the harp, the lute, and, in the second half of the song, a flourish of trumpets.

Arise Lord into thy rest is a different sort of work. It is really an English motet, in the same vein as some other pieces in the second half of the book, most notably ***Praise our Lord all ye Gentiles*** and ***Turn our captivity, O Lord***. Byrd had spent a lot of his energy in his earlier life on richly scored and densely woven Latin motets for five or six voices. This was a type of music he had described to his audience at the end of the 1580s (many of whom seem to have been besotted with the newest madrigalian fashions) as "things of more depth and skill". Now, in what he called "my old yeares", he was composing very similar works in the English language instead. In 1612, just a year after this music went to press, Orlando Gibbons gave a set of his own serious English songs the title of "Motets". That seems to have been what Byrd had in

mind with a work such as the memorable *Turn our captivity*, which is very close in spirit to the motets of lament and rejoicing he had cultivated as a younger musician in a Catholic community that was being overwhelmed (nearly every year, it seemed at times) by waves of political turmoil, hope, and devastation. It is no coincidence that this whole group of Byrd's new vernacular motets uses the Catholic version of the psalms smuggled into England by his colleague Richard Verstegan.

With the first chords of ***Have mercy upon me O God***, we enter an entirely new sound-world. Those chords bring us into one of the most beautiful and characteristic forms of English Renaissance chamber music: songs for solo voice and viols, sometimes adorned with a small chorus of singers. Byrd had written many 'consort songs' of this sort in previous decades, but he had made the shrewd business decision of rearranging them for voices alone when he put them into print. At this point he was no longer interested in compromise. He knew the sound he wanted, and that sound included stringed instruments. It was a sound that was cultivated at the royal court, in the cathedral choir schools (where boys were taught to play the viol as well as sing), and, by the early 17th century, in many musically inclined households. Byrd's greatest patron Sir John Petre, who often invited the composer as his guest for the winter holidays, would routinely hire half a dozen professional viol players during the twelve days of Christmas. Byrd brought his host an annual gift of two turkeys, a fashionable New World choice which he clearly preferred to the more traditional Christmas goose. "Mr Byrd's chamber", with its feather bed and "country coverlet", was spruced up for the occasion, and the keyboard instruments in the house were tuned. Those convivial gatherings seem to be the origin of a pair of songs near the end of this book. Byrd (quite unusually) gave these two songs their own subtitles: ***This day Christ was born*** is "A Carroll for Christmas day", and ***O God that guides the cheerful sun*** is "A Carroll for New-year's day". The viol players were clearly all still present at the beginning of January because their services are called for in the New Year carol. The six-part **Fantasia**,

which immediately precedes the two Christmastide songs, also uses something of a luxury scoring, requiring two bass viols (much like the two agile bass singers needed for *Praise our Lord all ye Gentiles*) and offering a microcosm of what Jacobean viol consorts were playing at home and at court. There is even a little surprise galliard about three-fourths of the way through.

Except for the textless Fantasia, the whole six-part section of the book consists of devotional music of various kinds. It ends in a serious and introspective mood. Byrd wrote that he was offering music "melancholy, merry, or mixt of both", and he chooses to finish on the melancholy side. ***Ah silly soul*** and ***How vain the toils*** are reflections on earthly delusion and vanity. Both are consort songs, with beautiful intertwining lines for the five viols that surround the solo voice. The final cadence of *How vain the toils*, and of the whole collection, is not at all a big finish in a rhetorical sense; in fact it ends with the final unaccented syllable of the poem almost suspended in the air. It has been a long journey from the light three-part music at the very start of the album. In these last two songs, Byrd is taking his leave of the musical world in which he had worked for more than half a century. They reflect his own words in the preface, where he quotes the Stoic philosopher Seneca: "The sun's light is sweetest at the very moment of its setting".

At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero is left standing alone on stage after his play has been played out and all his spells have been cast. It has often been said that this final monologue of Shakespeare's last play in 1611 was his own farewell to the theatre, to his listeners and his performers, entrusting them with his work:

> Gentle breath of yours my sails
> Must fill, or else my project fails,
> Which was to please.

Byrd also speaks directly to his audience in his last songbook. The first part of the preface, with its learned Latin epigram from Seneca and its protestations of weariness in old age, is addressed to his patron the Earl of Cumberland. The second part is addressed to us: "to all true lovers of

Musicke". Like Prospero, Byrd is entrusting us with the success of his own project. His words are worth quoting at some length.

> Onely this I desire; that you will be but as carefull to heare them [the songs] well expressed, as I have beene both in the Composing and correcting of them. Otherwise the best Song that ever was made will seeme harsh and unpleasant, for that the well expressing of them, either by Voyces, or Instruments, is the life of our labours, which is seldome or never well performed at the first singing or playing. Besides a song that is well and artificially [artistically] made cannot be well perceived nor understood at the first hearing, but the oftner you shall heare it, the better cause of liking you will discover.

On the surface, this is simply Byrd's response to the perennial temptation just to sight-read everything without further ado. His younger colleague Thomas Robinson says something similar in the *Schoole of Musicke*, a guide for aspiring musicians that was published just a few years earlier. Robinson warns the prospective sight-reader to "looke it over before you offer to play it", and cautions that music will be "impossible to play well without the knowledge therof". That is all well and good as advice to elementary students, but Byrd goes beyond this common-sense guidance by emphasising the rewards of getting to know and love a piece of music. He also asks the reader to devote as much care to performing and listening as he has devoted to his own "labours" in "composing and correcting". There are no high-minded ideas here of direct musical inspiration. Composing music, for Byrd, was clearly hard work, and he used earthy metaphors to describe it in a number of his other publications. He wrote about bringing his music "back to the lathe", improving the form and smoothing out the rough spots. (This was familiar language to him. His sister Barbara married into a family of instrument makers, and she helped run the shop and build instruments that Byrd himself played, including the pipe organ that was tuned every year in preparation for the Petre family's Christmas festivities.)

The musical workshop, in Byrd's own words, was an orchard or a garden that needed constant cultivation. The printing press, for him, was a winepress, something that was messy and involved a lot of crushing. The translators of the Authorized Version used exactly the same kind of metaphors in their own preface to their new Bible in 1611: cracking, digging, blacksmithing. "Neither did we disdain", as they said, "to revise that which we had done, and to bring back to the anvil that which we had hammered". For them, as for Byrd, creation and revision was an almost physical effort.

Byrd described his own last songs in this book as "framed to the life of the Words". "Framed to the life" has the ring of cliché, of a commonplace used by English Renaissance authors. In fact it was not at all a common phrase. It does appear in one other place, a surprising place, only two years before Byrd used it in 1611: the anonymous preface to Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, where the editor praises "this authors Commedies, that are so fram'd to the life, that they serve for the most common Commentaries, of all the actions of our lives, shewing such a dexteritie, and power of witte, that the most displeased with Playes, are pleasd with his Commedies". Whatever the anonymous editor was thinking when he (apparently) classified the rather grotesque and bloodthirsty *Troilus and Cressida* as a comedy, what we have here is really a more general statement about creative genius. Shakespeare's comic characters are "so fram'd to the life" that we recognize ourselves in them, and our own foibles, and the absurdities of our own lives. They are funny because they are visible and audible manifestations of an underlying reality. It is appealing to imagine Byrd reading this sentence and finding that it also applied to musical wit and creativity, although we have no evidence that he ever owned a copy of that particular play, or of any other play by Shakespeare. In any case he used the same phrase when he wrote about his own songs as "framed to the life of the Words". The key detail here is the *life* of the words, that elusive middle term. Almost every Elizabethan or Jacobean song could be described as "framed to the words"; practically everyone, including Byrd himself, took the chance when they could

to depict laughter, rustic dancing, the rising and setting of the sun, or other low-hanging fruit. Morley memorably wrote in 1597 that composers should indulge in madrigalisms of that sort when the opportunity presented itself, because it would be even more silly ("a great absurditie") not to. In many of these beautiful late songs, especially in the more inward-looking ones such as *Turn our captivity* or *Retire my soul*, something much more profound is going on. There is an inner life to the text which Byrd distils and reveals through a sort of musical alchemy.

"True lovers of Musicke" will also recognize the truth of Byrd's statement that "the oftner you shall heare it, the better cause of liking you will discover". That is a moving insight from a mature composer who had lived through so many changes in musical practice and style. It also finds some echoes in another very early edition of Shakespeare, in this case the preface to the First Folio in 1623, where the editors (like Byrd) break the fourth wall and speak directly to the reader: "Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: And if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him". Byrd is saying more or less the same thing: "Hear me, therefore; and again, and again". There is one important difference here. Shakespeare's posthumous editors and admirers were making this claim for their playwright. Byrd made the claim for himself while he was very much alive and still publishing. This is the confidence—one could even say the nerve—of someone who knows that his music is exceptionally good, and who knows that we will only gain in knowledge and delight from spending more time with it. More than 400 years and one complete recording later, it is clearer than ever that Byrd was right.

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CD 1

1 The eagle's force

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Katy Hill *soprano*, Mark Dobell *tenor*

The Eagle's force subdues each Bird that flies:
What metal may resist the flaming fire?
Doth not the Sun dazzle the clearest eyes?
And melt the ice, and make the frost retire?
Who can withstand a puissant King's desire?
The stiffest stones are pierced through with tools:
The wisest are with Princes made but fools.

Thomas Churchyard (*c.* 1520-1604)
from *Jane Shore*

2 Of flattering speech

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Katy Hill *soprano*, Mark Dobell *tenor*

Of flattering speech with sugared words beware:
Suspect the heart whose face doth fawn and smile,
With trusting these the world is clogged with care,
And few there be can scape these Vipers vile,
With pleasing speech they promise and protest,
When hateful hearts lie hid within their breast.

Geffrey Whitney (*c*.1548-*c*.1601) *Latet anguis in herba*
from *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586)

3 In winter cold

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Katy Hill *soprano*, Mark Dobell *tenor*

In Winter cold when tree and bush was bare,
And frost had nipped the roots of tender grass,
The Ants with joy did feed upon their fare,
Which they had stored while Summer season was,
To whom for food a Grasshopper did cry,
And said she starved if they did help deny.

Geffrey Whitney (*c*.1548-*c*.1601) *Dum aetatis ver agitur: consule brumae* from *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586)

4 Whereat an ant

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Katy Hill *soprano*, Mark Dobell *tenor*

Whereat an Ant with long experience wise,
And frost and snow, had many Winters seen,
Inquired what in Summer was her guise.
Quoth she, I sung and hopped in meadows green.
Then quoth the Ant, content thee with thy chance,
For to thy song now art thou like to dance.

Geffrey Whitney (*c*.1548-*c*.1601) *Dum aetatis ver agitur: consule brumae* from *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586)

5 Who looks may leap

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Katy Hill *soprano*, Mark Dobell *tenor*

Who looks may leap and save his shins from knocks,
Who tries may trust, else flatt'ring friends shall find:
He saves the Steed, that keeps him under locks:
Who speaks with heed may boldly speak his mind:
But he whose tongue before his wit doth run,
Oft speaks too soon, and grieves when he hath done.

Geffrey Whitney (*c*.1548-*c*.1601) *Verbum emissum non est revocabile* from *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586)

6 Sing ye to our Lord a new song

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Emilia Morton *soprano*, Jeremy Budd *tenor*

Sing ye to our Lord a new song,
his praise in the Church of saints.
Let Israel be joyful, be joyful in him that made him,
and let the daughters of Sion rejoice in their King.

Psalm 149: 1-2

7 I have been young, but now am old

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Emilia Morton *soprano*, Jeremy Budd *tenor*

I have been young, but now am old,
Yet did I never see the righteous forsaken,
Nor his seed begging their bread.

Psalm 149: 1-2

8 In crystal towers

Soli: Alexandra Kidgell, Emilia Morton *soprano*, Jeremy Budd *tenor*

In Crystal Towers, and turrets richly set
With glittering gems, that shine against the Sun,
In regal rooms of Jasper and of Jet,
Content of mind not always likes to woon:
But often times it pleaseth her to stay,
In simple cotes enclosed with walls of clay.

Geffrey Whitney (*c*.1548-*c*.1601) *Animus, non res*
(To Edward Paston Esq.)
from *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586)

9 This sweet and merry month of May

This sweet and merry month of May,
while nature wantons in her prime,
And birds do sing, and beasts do play,
For pleasure of the joyful time:
I choose the first for holiday,
And greet Eliza with a rhyme.
O beauteous Queen, of second Troy:
Take well in worth a simple toy.

Attrib. Thomas Watson (*c*.1557-92)

10 Let not the sluggish sleep

Let not the sluggish sleep,
close up thy waking eye,
Until with judgment deep
thy daily deeds thou try.
He that one sin in conscience keeps
when he to quiet goes,
More ventrous is than he that sleeps
with twenty mortal foes.

11 A feigned friend

A feigned friend by proof I find
to be greater foe,
Than he that with a spiteful mind,
doth seek my overthrow:
For of the one I can beware,
With craft the other breeds my care.

Such men are like the hidden Rocks,
Which in the Seas doe lie:
Against the which each Ship that knocks,
Is drowned sodainly.
No greater fraud, nor more unjust,
Then false deceit hid under trust.

12 Awake mine eyes

Awake mine eyes, see Phoebus bright arising,
And lesser Lights to shades obscure descending:
Glad Philomela sits tunes of joy devising,
Whilst in sweet notes, from warbling throats,
The Silvan Choir with like desire,
To her are Echoes sending.

13 Come jolly swains

Come jolly Swains, come let us sit around,
And with blithe Carrols sullen cares confound.
The Shepherd's life
Is void of strife,
No worldly treasures
Distastes our pleasures
With free consenting,
Our minds contenting,
We smiling laugh
While others sigh repenting.

14 What is life, or worldly pleasure?

What is life, or worldly pleasure?
Seeming shadows quickly sliding.
What is wealth or golden treasure?
Borrowed Fortune never biding.
What is grace or Princes' smiling?
Hoped honour, time beguiling.
What are all in one combined,
which divided so displease?
Apish toys, and vain delights,
mind's unrest, and soul's disease.

15 Fantasia (in 4 parts)

16 Come let us rejoice unto our Lord

Come let us rejoice unto our Lord,
let us make joy to God our Saviour.
Let us approach to his presence in confession,
and in Psalms let us make joy to him.

Psalm 95: 1-2

17 Retire my soul, consider thine estate

Retire my soul, consider thine estate,
And justly sum thy lavish sin's account.
Time's dear expense, and costly pleasures rate,
How follies grow, how vanities amount.
Write all these down, in pale Death's reckoning tables,
Thy days will seem but dreams, thy hopes but fables.

18 Arise Lord into thy rest

Arise Lord into thy rest,
thou, and the Ark of thy sanctification.
Let the Priests be clothed with justice,
and let the Saints rejoice.

Psalm 132: 8-9

19 Come woeful Orpheus

Come woeful Orpheus with thy charming Lyre,
And tune my voice unto thy skilful wire,
Some strange Chromatic Notes do you devise,
That best with mournful accents do sympathise,
Of sourest Sharps and uncouth Flats make choice,
And I'll thereto compassionate my voice.

CD 2

1 Sing we merrily unto God

Sing we merrily unto God our strength,
make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob.
Take the Shawn, bring hither the Tabret,
the merry Harp with the Lute.

Psalm 81: 1-2

2 Blow up the trumpet

Blow up the Trumpet in the new Moon,
ev'n in the time appointed,
and upon our solemn feast day:
for this was made a statute for Israel,
and a Law of the God of Jacob.

Psalm 81: 3-4

3 Crowned with flowers

Crowned with flowers, I saw fair Amaryllis,
By Thyrsis sit, hard by a fount of Crystal,
And with her hand more white than snow or Lilies,
On sand she wrote, my faith shall be immortal,
And suddenly a storm of wind and weather,
Blew all her faith and sand away together.

4 Wedded to will is witless

Wedded to will is witless,
And seldom he is skilful,
That bears the name of the wise, and yet is wilful.
To govern he is fitless,
That deals not by election,
but by his fond affection.
O that it might be treason,
for men to rule by will, and not by reason.

5 Make ye joy to God

Make ye joy to God all the earth.
Serve ye our Lord in gladness.
Enter ye in before his sight.
In jollity know ye that our Lord he is God,
he made us and not we ourselves.

Psalm 100: 1-3

6 Have mercy upon me O God

Solo: Katy Hill *soprano*

Have mercy upon me O God,
after thy great goodness.
And according to the multitude of thy mercies
wipe away mine offences.
Wash me clean from my wickedness,
and purge me from my sins. Amen.

Psalm 51: 1-2

7 Fantasia (in 6 parts)

8 This day Christ was born

This day Christ was born,
this day our saviour did appear,
This day the Angels sing in earth,
The Archangels are glad.
This day the just rejoice saying:
Glory be to God on high. Alleluia.

9 O God that guides the cheerful sun

Solo: Katy Hill *soprano*

O God that guides the cheerful sun,
by motions strange the year to frame,
Which now returned whence it begun,
from heaven extols thy glorious name.
This new-year's season sanctify,
with double blessings of thy store,
That graces new may multiply,
and former folies reign no more.

So shall our hearts with heaven agree,
and both give laud and praise to thee.

Th'old year by course is past and gone,
old Adam Lord from us expel:
New creatures make us everyone,
new life becomes the New-year well.
As new born babes from malice keep,
new wedding garments O Christ we crave:
That we thy face in heaven may see
with Angels bright our souls to save.

So shall our hearts with heaven agree,
and both give laud and praise to thee. Amen.

10 Praise our Lord all ye Gentiles

Praise our Lord all ye Gentiles,
praise him all ye people.
Because his mercy is confirmed upon us,
and his truth remaineth forever. Amen.

Psalm 117

11 Turn our captivity, O Lord

Turn our captivity, O Lord, as a brook in the South.
They that sow in tears shall reap in joyfulness.
Going they went and wept, casting their seeds,
but coming they shall come with jollity,
carrying their sheaves with them.

Psalm 126: 4-6

12 Ah silly soul

Solo: Elisabeth Paul *alto*

Ah silly soul, how are thy thoughts confounded
betwixt two loves, that far unlikely are?
Lust's love is blind, and by no reason bounded.
Heaven's love is clear, and fair beyond compare.
No wonder though this love light not thy mind,
whilst looking through false love thine eyes are blind.

13 How vain the toils

Solo: Elisabeth Paul *alto*

How vain the toils that mortal men do take
to hoard up gold that time doth turn to dross,
forgetting him who only for their sake,
his precious blood did shed upon the Cross.
And taught us all in heaven to hoard our treasure,
where true increase doth grow above all measure.

§ The Sixteen

SOPRANO	ALTO	TENOR	BASS
Julie Cooper	Daniel Collins	Jeremy Budd	Ben Davies
Katy Hill	Edward McMullan	Mark Dobell	Eamonn Dougan
Alexandra Kidgell	Elisabeth Paul	Oscar Golden-Lee	Tim Jones
Charlotte Mobbs	Kim Porter	George Pooley	Rob Macdonald
Emilia Morton			
Ruth Provost			

FRETWORK

VIOLS

Emily Ashton	Jacob Garside*	Joanna Levine
Richard Boothby	Reiko Ichise	Asako Morikawa

**CD 2,* 7 *only*

Harry Christophers stands among today's great champions of choral music. In partnership with The Sixteen, the ensemble he founded over 42 years ago, he has set benchmark standards for the performance of everything from late medieval polyphony to important new works by contemporary composers. His international influence is supported by more than 160 recordings and has been enhanced by his work as Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society and as guest conductor worldwide.

Photograph: Marco Borggreve

The Sixteen's soundworld, rich in tonal variety and expressive nuance, reflects Christophers' determination to create a vibrant choral instrument from the blend of adult professional singers. Under his leadership The Sixteen has established its annual Choral Pilgrimage to cathedrals, churches and other UK venues, created the *Sacred Music* series for BBC television, and developed an acclaimed period-instrument orchestra. Highlights of their recent work include an Artist Residency at Wigmore Hall, a large-scale tour of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, and the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Symphony No.5, 'Le grand Inconnu'*; their future projects, meanwhile, comprise a series devoted to Purcell and an ongoing survey of Handel's dramatic oratorios.

Having been Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society for 13 years, Harry has been appointed their Conductor Laureate. He has also worked as guest conductor with, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie. Christophers' extensive commitment to opera has embraced productions for English National Opera and Lisbon Opera and work with the Granada, Buxton and Grange festivals.

He was appointed a CBE in the Queen's 2012 Birthday Honours for his services to music. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates in Music from the Universities of Leicester, Northumbria, Canterbury Christ Church and Kent.

§ The Sixteen

Photograph: Firedog

Whether performing a simple medieval hymn or expressing the complex musical and emotional language of a contemporary choral composition, The Sixteen does so with qualities common to all great ensembles. Tonal warmth, rhythmic precision and immaculate intonation are clearly essential to the mix. But it is the courage and intensity with which The Sixteen makes music that speak above all to so many people.

The Sixteen gave its first concert in 1979 under the direction of Founder and Conductor Harry Christophers CBE. Their pioneering work since has made a profound impact on the performance of choral music and attracted a large new audience, not least as 'The Voices of Classic FM' and through BBC television's *Sacred Music* series.

The voices and period-instrument players of The Sixteen are at home in over five centuries of music, a breadth reflected in their annual Choral Pilgrimage to Britain's

great cathedrals and sacred spaces, regular appearances at the world's leading concert halls, and award-winning recordings for The Sixteen's CORO and other labels.

Recent highlights include the world premiere of James MacMillan's *Symphony No. 5, 'Le grand Inconnu'*, commissioned for The Sixteen by the Genesis Foundation, an ambitious ongoing series of Handel oratorios, and a debut tour of China.

FRETWORK has been around for getting on for 40 years, performing music old and new, and looking forward to a challenging and exciting future as the world's leading consort of viols.

They have expanded their repertory to include music from over 500 years, from the first printed consort music in Venice in 1501 to music written this year. And, in between, everything that can be played on a consort of viols – Byrd & Schubert, Purcell & Shostakovitch, Gibbons & Britten, Dowland & Grieg.

While they used to fly all over the globe, they have now committed to reducing their carbon footprint by travelling in Europe only by train or electric cars – they recently completed their first tour of Germany in their two Teslas and will visit France, Spain, Austria & Slovenia later this year.

The future sees many exciting projects based on the thrilling juxtaposition of old and new; making the experience of old music new and bringing the sensibilities of past ages to bear on contemporary music.

Recording Producer
Mark Brown

Recording Engineer
Mike Hatch (Floating Earth)

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